The Unitarian Christian

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EDITORIAL

Our Fellowship is pretty thoroughly stirred up by the passage of the Resolution that the word "Christian" be replaced by the word "Unitarian" in the name of our denominational periodical. For a hundred and twenty-five years it has been the *Christian Register*. Now it is to be the *Unitarian Register*.

The casual observer may ask what difference it makes. The *Register* is a self-directive institution in its own right; under no obligations to heed the recommendations of anybody but its own Editorial Board. But the sad fact is that Mr. Casual Observer speaks from an ignorance of the facts. At its founding in 1821, and for the next ensuing one hundred years, the *Christian Register* has been exactly as outlined above: a spontaneous and wholly independent enterprise, started by a group of ardent Unitarians to serve as a mouthpiece for any thoughtful person who felt he had a few ideas worth offering to the public at a time of intense feeling and violent discussion. It had nothing to do with the American Unitarian Association — no technical connection whatever with it. But it had everything to do with it of a sympathetic and cooperative nature. It was another separate independent agency working to the same end. It felt free to criticise the action and policy of the Association, and sometimes did so. It enjoyed the editorial services of the best minds in our Fellowship. In fact, as an instrument of prompt, honest, fearless, and sometimes stinging self-criticism which is one of the most valuable and efficacious safeguards that such a body as ours can have, it has served our cause far more beneficially than we perhaps can imagine. It received no financial assistance from the Association, but floated proudly on its own buoyancy, and jealously fought off all attempts of the Association to secure some sort of toehold on its editorial board.

It did enjoy the benefactions of one simon-pure Angel: Mr. George H. Ellis of blessed memory. He recognized its great value as a safeguard against the bureaucracy which is pretty sure to granulate, insidiously, in any organisation like our American Unitarian Association, and gave, literally, thousands of dollars out of his own pocket for its support and continued independence. We shall never know how deeply indebted we are to Mr. Ellis.

With but one or two exceptions no religious journal has succeeded in supporting itself. The *Christian Register* was not one of the exceptions. Its doom was sealed with the death of Mr. Ellis; and in a few months it became apparent that the only way to save the periodical was to turn it over, *in toto*, to the American Unitarian Association, who were willing to take it and use it as one of the instruments in their hands for propagating the Gospel of Liberal Christianity, or at least of Liberal Religion. This is the fact that our friend Mr. Casual Observer must bear in mind before he ventures to make any comments. The *Register* is no longer an independent organ; it is the property of the American Unitarian Association. There was a time when the *Register* could have said in the words of Sergeant Tilman Joy: "You can resolute till the cows come home, but I am not your property. I am wholly independent of you and of everybody else. I have the right and the intention to choose my own name, determine my own policy, and manage my own affairs without interference from you."

That time has gone. Now, a resolution passed at a regular annual meeting of the American Unitarian Association, by a duly appointed body of delegates, and which has been properly submitted to the Resolutions Committee, discussed by them, OK'd by them, and submitted by them for presentation and action at a regular business session of the Association, becomes, if passed, a mandate which the officers of the Association must obey. There is no technical fault or irregularity. The entire procedure has been sound, solid, and watertight. And technically it has all been done in the daylight of full publicity.

(Continued on last page)

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Unitarian Christianity and a Christian Unitarianism

George Huntston Williams

Preached at the Ordination of Richard Spencer Hasty, Fall River, Massachusetts
November 18, 1956

TEXT: 1st Thessalonians 5: 21, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

You who are members of the Unitarian Society in Fall River are here gathered to ordain and install Richard Spencer Hasty as your minister.

The rest of us have been invited by him and by you to help solemnize the occasion by our presence, and to interpret and celebrate its significance in sermon, prayer, and praise. Mr. Hasty takes his place in a succession going back to 1832.

One of the most renowned of your ministers was Samuel Longfellow, brother of the famous poet, and Professor of Romance Literature at Harvard. Samuel himself was a poet; many of his hymns are to be found in our hymnal. At the Harvard Divinity School, Samuel had become associated with that group of hymn-writers who have been called, in the history of American Hymnody, the "Cambridge School." His inspiration was that literary, philosophical, and religious movement called "Transcendentalism," which rose within the Unitarian circle, eventually dividing it into two parties, and which did not spend its full force even after giving up its name following the Civil War, when it came to be more commonly designated "Theism." Theism was a term used in self-conscious distinction to Unitarian Christianity. For Transcendentalism, or Theism, broke away on principle from any unique claim to Christianity. People today, who use the terms "Unitarian Christian," and "Theist" interchangeably should be reminded that these labels formerly designated the two opposing parties created by Transcendentalism within the Unitarian denomination. Your minister of about a century ago (1848-1851) wrote an important essay entitled "Theism," in which he defended the universal as distinguished from the particularistic or Christian conception of Unitarianism. We can at this point have no more apt and specific a description of Theism in its comprehensiveness than the words of Samuel Longfellow himself:

> *Religious* is a higher and broader word than Christian; and so is *Human*. Jewish, Brahmin, Buddhist, Parsee, Mohammedan, these, too, are churches of the One Living God, the Father of all. With advancing light, thoughtful men in all of them will come out of what is peculiar and special in each, and so local and temporary, into the broad ground of universal, spiritual religion, which is Piety, Righteousness, Humanity, that belief in God and in man which is the creed of all creeds. . . . This is the Eternal Gospel; this the true Church Catholic; the Church not of Rome, nor of England; the Church not of Buddha, nor of Moses, nor of Christ; but of God and Man.

There can be but few in this Congregation who are not moved by these words, winged by the exaltation of a universal vision of religion still to be realized.

Yet we know that the Church of Moses, the Church of Buddha, and all the others have in our day, far from coming closer together, actually intensified their convictions in the measure that especially the Asian and Moslem lands have awakened to their national heritages. Everywhere, religion, or an ideological substitute therefor, has become the instrument of national policy. Even our own country has re-discovered the Judaeo-Christian sanctions of Democracy, and has been tempted to interpret its world-struggle solely in terms of a clash between believing Democracy and godless Communism.

In this new situation, with the world groping through the U.N. for new sanctions of law and order among the peoples and disparate social traditions of the earth, the historic interest of American Unitarians in, and openness to, what is commonly called "world religion" seems at once *pertinent* and yet *impotent*.

I have been invited to take the occasion of this ordination to reflect with you on the special missions of the religous body in the ministry of which a man is being set apart this day. And I have taken, not precisely as my text, but rather as my Biblical sanction the verse from 1st Thessalonians, 5: 21; "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

This was indeed the text chosen by William Ellery Channing when he was invited to preach the sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks as the minister of the new independent Unitarian Society in Baltimore, in 1819. It need scarcely be mentioned that his sermon, entitled "Unitarian Christianity" is not only a classic of America Unitarianism, but also a widely acknowledged monument in the development of American Christianity as a whole, and even in American literary culture. In this sermon Chan-

ning sought to prove the validity of Scripture by subjecting it to the canons of reason, and to extricate from historic Christianity itself some five doctrinal principles to which he could hold fast as pre-eminently good. For many years this sermon and the abundant commentary thereon, effectively defined the nature of Unitarianism until the Transcendentalism, of which we have spoken, came to divide the denomination into liberal Christians in the line of Channing, on the one hand, and the supra-Christian Theists on the other. In the course of American Unitarian history most of the Theists remained within the denomination. And most of the liberal Christians, by imperceptible changes, became in effect, and often in name, Theists. Concurrently, some of the Theists and many of their successors came to call themselves Humanists, in their more radical phrasing of their position. Thus the denomination has, broadly speaking, three main strands: liberal Christians, Theists, and Humanists; whose genetic and theological relationship is obscured, not only by the common, oversimplified contrast Humanist-Theist, but even by the name of the denomination itself. He who is a Humanist cannot, in terms of the original theology of the denomination, properly be called "Unitarian" any more than "Trinitarian." Indeed the recognition of the inapplicability of a designation that distinguishes those who believe in the unity of God from those who believe in a triune Deity has encouraged many members of the denomination to re-define the denominational label and construe it as indicative of the common quest of the free mind for religious and social unity. In this spirit, a western Unitarian newspaper has long borne the name Unity. All three of the positions distinguished can vindicate for themselves a rightful place in the ever-expanding denomination. I should like to look back with you upon a century and a half of American Unitarianism, and suggest ways in which Unitarians may prove all things done and said in these three trends and, holding fast to that which has proved good, reconceive their mission in today's religious setting.

American Christianity and, one might add, American culture cannot be understood by those who fail to perceive the tremendous contribution of Unitarians in the early and middle nineteenth century all out of proportion to the size of the denomination. It is clear that the role of Unitarians in the present need not be the same as in the past. And as one who holds that the church must always discharge the dual role of the priestly conserver, and the prophetic critic of society at large, and even of religion itself, I should not wish to be seen standing here urging an un-critical return to the Unitarian past. Nevertheless, the most natural title for what I can here only outline—for ordination sermons are not so long as they once were 150 years ago —is "Christian Unitarianism." The fact that one can phrase such a title is a clear indicaton of what has happened to the movement which began in Massachusetts about 150 years ago, and which Channing described as "Unitarian Christianity." For the very designation "Christian Unitarianism" pre-supposes the existence and the widespread acceptance of other kinds of Unitarianism.

Without disputing their place in the denomination and the seriousness of their witness, I should like to invite you to look with me at five points of a liberal Christianity, which may be said to have found full, or at least groping, expression in the past 150 years; and which, when adequately supplemented to round out the full life and thought of any complete religious society, should give promise of an, at least, equally significant century and a half ahead; for there are thousands of Christians and would-be Christians who today deeply long for a fresh formulation of inchoate convictions, hopes, and surmises in respect to Christianity and its role in the world today which perhaps no other Christian denomination is so well fitted by its history and aptitudes to carry out as is the Unitarian branch.

These five points do not constitute the whole of a Unitarian Christianity, with a mission so conceived; but rather a selection of the natural ministrations and concerns, and the historically grounded specialties, as it were, of a denomination that would be prepared to rethink its position among the many branches of Christianity. It cannot be my purpose to elaborate, argue, and ground these points historically and theologically, but merely to suggest the pattern for an on-going discussion.

The first point concerns the relationship of Christianity to the religions of the world and to the vision of a mankind united in one household as brothers under God. In the measure that the main-line Protestant denominations along with the Eastern orthodox bodies turn in ecumenical concern to bridge the gulfs that separate themselves, one from another, the inevitable consequences of their looking inward to their essence, and backward to their sources, is to become so pre-occupied with Christianity that conversations with believing and unbelieving groups outside Christendom are largely suspended; and this lull comes at the very moment in world-history when Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mohammedanism have become notably articulate and re-invigorated by their new nationalist aspirations and cultural asignments. By historic experience and disposition a truly Christian Unitarianism is still strategically located to help in the mutual understanding so greatly needed to-

day. But the Unitarian denomination does not become better suited to its interpretive or ambassadorial role among the world's religions by becoming less Christian itself.

Think of a political parallel. We wish to have our ambassador to India friendly to India and its culture. We know indeed that all nations appreciate the efforts of envoys to acquire the difficult languages, and to familiarize themselves with the history and culture of the peoples to whom they are accredited. But if our ambassador became so immersed in things foreign that he failed to represent the United States, he would have to be recalled, not because India, for example, is not just as important and worthy among the nations as our own, but simply because the task of an ambassador is to remain scrupulously loyal to his own country, with all its strengths and weaknesses, while trying to interpret to the best of his ability the needs and expectations of the nation to which he is accredited. It is the same in religion. Significant theological conversations cease when one or both parties become completely detached from their religious base in their pre-occupation with religious unity. Unitarians have surely become detached from historic religion when they consider rites, myths, theological formulations, disciplines and organizations as inferior and compromising aspects of high religion, and propose that only by the attenuation, relativisation, or even the elimination of them can the primary unity beneath in all of them be revealed to view. I submit that the "Church," using this word now as a generic term for the whole organizational and liturgical complex of meaningful religious life without which religion is but a dream or a vision glimpsed, must be as seriously heeded as theological and ethical generalizations.

To change the image; a bridge church must be in contact with both sides if spiritual traffic is to pass at all. Unitarianism must remain, or become once again, articulately Christian in order to continue to perform its bridge or ambassadorial role between Christianity and the other religions.

Beginning almost a hundred and fifty years ago Unitarians sought to carry out this mission, first among the bellicose Christian sects*themselves, and then among the world religions,** awakened to the task by the Transcendentalists who were especially interested in India. To continue in its irenic and interpretative role among the world religions Unitarianism must in the future take more seriously than in the past the significance of Church and Tradition, both in Christianity and in the other religions.

For example, the ordination which you, the lay members of this church, will presently enact is especially meaningful in the theology of the original Congregationalism out of which both modern Congregationalists and Unitarians have emerged, for the local church duly gathered was conceived as possessing the powers and sanctions of the universal and invisible Church of God's Elect. But if the doctrine of predestination and Christ's leadership of an invisible church is weakened, the religious authority of the local congregations, and the policy we call "congregational" must be thought through afresh.

Unitarianism has continued the Puritan policy long after abandoning some of the theological reasons for it. In fact, Unitarians were originally so wary of ecclesiastical authority that in many places it came to prefer the word "society" to "church." But an alert denomination need not always be against the church. Or, to put it in another way, an historic opposition to, or mistrust of, the church and ecclesiasticism should be reconceived as a loyal opposition within the Great Church. Unitarians may oppose her excesses and what may seem to be her pretensions, but as the Mother of Parliaments let the opposition be loyal to certain common traditions, and to the common Sovereign, who is Christ.

And this suggests the second point, namely: the relationships of Christianity and Judaism. Significantly, the Yigdol which is a portion of the Eighteenth Blessing, of the Synagogal service, has been incorporated as the first hymn in the "Hymns of the Spirit." Reformed Judaism took its rise in Boston, and once acknowledged its indebtedness to the Unitarian spirit. But since those days of interchange the relations between Judaism and Unitarianism have slackened. Yet never in the long and mostly tragic history of Jewish-Christian relations has the opportunity been so great as today for significant interchange. The toll of millions of Jewish lives in our times, and the more recent establishment of the Jewish state, demand the closest attention of Christian and Jewish theologian, inquiring into the meaning of our history and mutual suffering. The unparalleled suffering of Jews in the midst of a once Christian society tolls with a deafening clang upon the ears of all for whom the providence and love of God and his Suffering Servant are meaningful concepts, and yet on both sides theologians move about on other theological or simply cultural errands as though they did not hear the insistent appeal.

If we are earnest about the Oneness of God and about God's ongoing Israel of history, then

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* See My Rethinking the Unitarian Relationship with Protestantism: An Examination of the Thought of Frederic Henry Hedge (1805-1890) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949)

** See my "Harvard and Hinduism," Awakened India, LXI 1956, pp. 55-59, a portion of which was printed in the *Christian Register* CXXXIV (1955) p. 23.

Unitarians must here too activate their historic mission. Any Christian denomination in the Puritan or sectarian tradition has a special sense for the problem of the old and the new Israel. And Unitarianism, a late fruit of New England Puritanism, has an additional advantage among Christian bodies for the task of engaging in a significant exploration with Judaism; for Unitarianism does not start the conversations between Christians and Jews in a complicated theological language. Christian Unitarians enter the discussion with a conception of Christ that is not so dogmatically fixed that debate and deliberation are pointless. It is a fact that even liberal churchmen in other denominations, when they turn to Judaism, erect as by reflex action, the ancient unaltered high Christology of a dogmatic age as the only basis for interchange with Jews; when within their own fold they have assimilated rather freely the insights of modern Biblical and historical criticism.

But the flexibility of the credally freer Unitarian Christian avails nothing if he has no Christology at all. For a form of Christianity without Jesus beheld in some sense as the Christ of Prophecy and the Christ of our Redemption cannot serve to represent historic Christianity in any exploratory way with Judaism, any more than Judaism can approach Christianity in a significant parley if it has lost all sense for the Talmud, and familiarity with the legacy of post-Biblical Jewry and its tongue. Christian Unitarianism must have then not only a renewed sense of the church, but a theologically and historically reformulated concept of Jesus Christ.

And a third point concerns the relationship of believing men to God, and this means in historic Christian terms an understanding of the Cross. Channing's central indictment of the orthodox Christianity of his day was that its doctrine of the atonement contrived to deprive God of the attributes of love and mercy. In a famous sermon he declared in righteous indignation that orthodox Christianity had monstrously erected a colossal gallows at the center of the cosmos, and had so recast the role of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, that he seemed more like an inexorable judge and executioner. And the very center of Channing's criticism was that orthodoxy seemed to have forgotten in its theological precision that the God of the Bible is a compassionate God who suffers with his people. In a letter to Samuel Cooper Thacher lin 1815 Channing declared that the Greek philosophical idea of God as impassible and immovable had actually distorted the Biblical experience of God as a Father capable of both love and anger but in either case compassionate, and that Unitarian Christianity by going back to the dogmatic systematization of the age of the great councils had rediscovered the God who was in Christ reconciling Himself with the world and suffering with it and for it. Patripassionism, as this view was anciently called, is one of the first of the more sophisticated heresies, but it has found recurrent expression in the history of the Church, often inadvertently as in Luther, or indirectly but massively in the Catholic system in which Mary as the Queen Mother of Heaven, suffers for and with her Son, even though the Heavenly Father does not. Unitarian Christianity has historically made a contribution in sensitizing Christian theologians to a major difficulty at the heart of this dogmatic structure, and can continue to make a meaningful contribution as long as it refuses to put the cross of Christ to one side as a tragic but theologically meaningless part of the mission of Christ. Channing believed not only in the crucifixion but the resurrection.

And this brings us to the fourth point, the relationship of religion and science. Unitarianism was the first Christian body to apply the principles of the growing natural sciences to religion; first to the Bible itself, and then to the Christian life. Channing believed in the New Testament miracles, but his successors were the first to perceive the significance of the miracle of evolution and, in the face of revolutionary disclosures of nineteenth century science, came away with hymns on their lips that have since enriched the hymnals of many denominations. American Unitarianism may look back with pride upon its traditional openness to the findings of science, and is therefore temperamentally, so to speak, disposed to enter into ever more complex exchanges between science and religion today. But here again the usefulness of the interchange depends upon the mutual respect of the two parties to the debate or deliberation. And if Unitarianism has no distinctively religious position of its own, it wastes the time of the natural scientists. For if it is merely a matter of popularizing the findings of science, or integrating them socially, there are more efficient agencies than the church. But there is in point of fact a real issue between the Christian and the scientist, qua scientist, and this is the question of the source of knowledge.

Religious people in general, and Christians in particular, maintain that beside reason and observation there is a second avenue through which meaning comes to us, namely, through revelation or faith. We are believing as well as knowing creatures. And therefore any significant exchange between religion and science must be undertaken by those who mutually agree, or at least are open to the possibility, that there are *two* valid ways of knowing. And only a Unitarian who has a creed, or rather the capac-

ity to say *credo,* I believe, can deliberate creatively with the natural or social scientist, who, as scientist, uses only one avenue of knowledge, but who, as a man, may well yearn for something more. By creed, of course, I mean not a set of beliefs, but the capacity for belief and the recognition that man has aother reason, which his scientific self knows not of.

And this leads to the last point, namely: the relation between man and the mass, between people and peoples, and the authority of conscience. Thus far our key words have been Church, Christ, Cross, and Credo. In some sense a vital Unitarian participant in the major concerns and responding to the quests of our time must preserve or recover a place for all these, and for a fifth, Conscience.

Unitarianism, it has been well said, was originally a revolt against Protestant orthodoxy more in the realm of the doctrine of man than in the doctrine of God. It was first dubbed Unitarian by its opponents. But the regnant concern was with man. The latter day emergence of Humanism within this denomination is a natural and legitimate consequence of this original pre-occupation. Channing and his associates held that man, created in the image of God, is essentially good. This proposition seemed more self-evident then than it does to us a hundred and fifty years later. But for this very reason it is a theological proposition all the more to be cherished in an age where conscience is widely thought to be the product of manipulable social environment without ultimate sanctions in the nature of God our Creator, in an age when the liberal spirit is looked upon as a manifestation of bourgeois indecision, in an age when evil grimaces at us in the faces of juveniles in our suburban streets, in a day when the impounded hatreds of anti-communism can spit upon the lynched corpse of communism.

There is a German proverb: We must not despair of humanity. The human world in which we live today is so ugly that that Christian group which can, soberly in the face of it all, declare with religious conviction and undeceived realistic vision, that man bears the image of the Creator of Heaven and earth, of Him who is the Lord of history, and the Lord God of the hosts of embattled righteousness, will be able to lift a banner of hope to which men of good-will may repair. But this sober and saving Humanism must be at once scientific and theological. Otherwise, pivoting human conduct around the conscience is fatuous. Unitarianism has been a denomination of the socially sensitized conscience and courageous action. To take but one example: it was the only denomination to take an official stand of conscience against the War with Mexico. For a hundred and fifty years it has been a denomination which has felt called upon to asserverate its principles of conscience in public resolutions. It has bestirred itself, often at great hazard to its reputation, in civil causes for the common good.

Richard Hasty, you are about to be ordained and installed as a minister of a local church, and in a denomination which has pioneered, a denomination which has instinctively sought the frontiers even when clinging to its historic base on the cultured eastern seaboard. May this geographical tension be taken as a symbol of the spirit of the denomination, which, peering into and exploring the new frontiers of our day, will hold fast to the theological and ethical continuities of our civilization.

Therefore, as you prepare to enter into the ministry of a denomination whose spiritual roots go back much more than a hundred and fifty years, may I enjoin upon you to think seriously with your parishioners and your fellow-ministers about the approprite missions and ministrations of Unitarianism in these days, to the end that, declaring the need of an organized CHURCH for the effectual embodiment of spiritual aspiration, proclaiming Jesus as the CHRIST of man's deepest yearnings, pointing to the true CROSS wherever it is set up, insisting on the place of the CREDO of divine disclosure as supplementary to the calculations of scientific discovery, and defending the sovereignty of CONSCIENCE grounded in the divine image within man, you may the more effectively minister to the needs of our age, make your contribution to the growing contacts between Christianity and other religions, restate in modern times the meaning of seeming tragedy and the role of suffering, notably in respect to Judaism, bring under the disciplines and insights of religion the overwhelming achievements and the global hazards of science, and uphold everywhere the dignity of men.

Strengthened by these convictions and concerns we can all enter humbly and creatively into those new relationships demanded of the adventurous in faith, leaving the outcome of our endeavor with Him, in whose fingers are the spaces and the times, and before whose face the generations rise and pass away. *Amen.*

BE CAREFUL

Christianity is an ambiguous term. It means the religion of Jesus, his personal thought and conviction, as set forth in the Synoptics. It also means a religion about Jesus, as set forth in the Gospel of John. There is no similarity between the two. Which of the two do we have in mind in our discussions over dropping the term "Christian"? It is just as well to understand each other.

Liberalism in Stereotype

Edwin C. Broome, Ph.D.

A few weeks ago I had lunch with a man who shall be nameless but whose normal calling brings him into daily contact with world affairs, including religious affairs. After some chatting, he elicited the fact I was a Unitarian, to which he replied that he had once had great hopes for the influence of religious liberalism, but it had now become stereotyped in certain directions and in consequence had receded from a position of significance. Actually, upon returning after a number of years away from a pulpit, this had been my impression, too, and it was personally gratifying, albeit discouraging, to have this feeling confirmed by an enlightened outside observer. Not only was this stereotypy evident with respect to an individual pulpit, and the demands of a congregation, but the impact of it at conferences and meetings was devastating. The sort of thing most of us got over being excited about sometime during our sophomore year at college was now basic liberalism, and represented the main areas of interest and discussion.

During the "missing years," a good deal seems to have transpired and, like my luncheon companion, I had been wondering what had happened to our traditional freedoms, including the freedom of the pulpit. Jefferson had said something to the effect that he had sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man. This was still being printed up in tracts but that was all, Voltaire and Emerson had echoed similar sentiments, but the freedom now seemed to be a one-way street. Instead of hostility to *every* form of tyranny, it seemed that the hostility was clearly limited to one direction only. What was happening, of course, was that a new orthodoxy was developing which had all the psychological accoutrements of old time fundamentalism. The "liberal way" was becoming narrower, and to travel it one must now accept a number of very specific elements, negatively or positively, as the case might be. Deviation was heresy, although naturally we never actually used the word.

This new orthodoxy seemed to be showing up in several fields. Years ago I had openly opposed the "Christian Committee" because I felt, wrongly as it has turned out, that it was seeking to impose an orthodoxy upon liberalism. Today, of course, the shoe is on the other foot, but the orthodoxy is even more evident. It seems to consist of, among other elements, the following: Blanshardism, Racism, Zionism, Laborism, Civil-right-ism, non-Christianism. These were some of the more significant stereotypes. An illustration may be suggestive. At an installation not long ago, a Methodist minister represented the community, and was asked to give the prayer. As he finished, he caught himself just in time; he almost said: "through Jesus Christ our Lord," but remembering where he was, he added somewhat lamely, "through God the Father, Amen." Afterwards one of the people said to the newly installed parson: "Wasn't it considerate of Rev. Jones to remember he was in a Unitarian Church." Considerate or not, it was rather a shame he felt he had to, and an even greater shame that we expect this kind of kid glove treatment.

The first of these stereotypes is Blanshardism. We might paraphrase Nathaniel's famous remark by asking: "Can anything good come out of Catholicism?" The Roman Catholic Church is doing a much better job among certain groups of refugees than most Protestant organizations, but it is increasingly unwise to tell this to Unitarians without paving the way with all manner of typical Blanshardite denunciations, slipping it in, if at all, as a grudging afterthought. As a student at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem a few years ago, where all my fellows were priests, I found a greater tolerance and freedom from pressure than I have in many Unitarian groups, and infinitely greater than would have been possible had the situation been reversed. Under the stereotype, however, there is only one kind of thing to say about Catholicism: it is evil. Actually, there are good things, good people and sincere, dedicated priests in that church; there is beauty and, above all, infinite tolerance. If this be heresy, make the most of it.

The second of these stereotypes is best called Racism. There are few right thinking people today who have any time for racial segregation. That it is a blight upon our nation cannot be denied. Yet the discussion and the crusading borders on the sophomoric. It should be obvious that before we can make genuine progress in many parts of the country, there must be first a sympathetic understanding of the viewpoint of those to whom desegregation represents a threat. To do otherwise is to play the KKK in reverse. In some areas, however, unless we are prepared to do just that, and enthusiastically prepared, to give the red carpet treatment to members of the Negro race, we are "anti-Negro." An objective

presentation of the problem is often ill-advised. It would appear to be heresy to maintain that a Negro is just as welcome at our churches, our gatherings and our meetings as a member of any other race, but *no more so.* Yet, when membership in a minority group gives a man special privileges and entitles him to special consideration and even adulation, a new tyranny is created. True liberalism and brotherhood can only be achieved when a man's race neither gives him special privileges nor imposes special restrictions on him. . . in other words, when we forget about it. A pulpit committee which writes a prospective minister that "all three races are represented in our church," is certainly not forgetting about it. This kind of thing is simply window-dressing, and not the beginning of brotherhood.

The next stereotype is Zionism. Here the situation is much as it is in Racism. A friend said to me at the May Meetings: "I don't see how a Unitarian can be pro-Arab!" This is no place to debate the Palestine issue, but it seems difficult to understand how genuine liberalism can support the privilege of one group and deny it to another, yet it would seem that a tenet of our new liberalism is that people, things and nations deserve V. I. P. treatment and status primarily by virtue of the fact they happen to be Jewish. Just as an objective presentation of the race problem would be ill-advised, a similar presentation of anti-Semitism and the Palestine question would be equally unwise. We are always open to a presentation of the "Arab" view, provided sufficient Zionist antitoxin is injected along with it; the Zionist view can be presented alone, but the Arab side is "controversial." Any number of good liberal excuses can be offered for Quibiyeh, Deir Yassin and the rest, but none whatever for Lidice in spite of the fact that the psychological content of the ideas of the Master Race and the Chosen People seem somewhat similar. Actually, we suspect a Jefferson or an Emerson would have insisted that ethical principles apply to all, and membership in a particular racial or religious minority group did not bestow special privilege in any respect.

Laborism and Civil Rights-ism. No decent minded person can tolerate injustices in these two fields, but when labor is "right" simply because it is labor, when the foulest practices and the most blatant graft are overlooked, when breach of contract and the plighted word become acceptable simply because the favor to labor, then we have passed the point of no return. The same is true of civil rights. No one denies the validity of civil rights and when loyalty oath requirements become unreasonable and even ridiculous, as they sometimes do, it is the duty of the liberal to denounce them. When restrictions on our freedom reach the point that human liberty is threatened, when no man is safe in his job, when "security reasons" cover anything from a genuine security risk (and there are such things!), to a desire to nab somebody's job, it is time to call a halt. By the same token, when, as in some areas, those guilty of treason are championed, and "liberalism" becomes scarcely distinguishable from political and economic views which if realized would destroy freedom for all, perhaps a halt should be called here, too. Liberalism, by its nature, cannot be identified with a political party or a particular economic theory. Typical was the remark of a minister at a recent Radford Conference: "I'm sure there are no Republicans present." The tragedy is, he was not trying to be funny, he meant it.

Non-Christianism is the last of the stereotypes, and in many ways the most disturbing. Now that the word "Christian" has been torpedoed from our denominational publication, we shall probably have another upsurge of this particular tyranny. These days pulpit readings can consist of anybody's writings from Carl Marx to Ben Gurion, but seldom the Old Testament. Many of us have felt constrained to explain if not apologize to our congregations for taking the step unusual in Unitarian circles of reading from I Corinthians or the Epistle to Jude instead of a selection from the Avesta (never the Koran, of course!), T. S. Eliot, or Margaret Sanger. Our rejection of the term "Christian" is the worst form of pedantry and literalism, for we seem to have forgotten it refers to an ethic, and a very good ethic, as well as numerous systems of theology. Jesus, if mentioned at all, must now be spoken of *sotto voce* or in the company of the other "great" in order to emphasize the fact we see nothing special in his life and teaching. Usually it is best to speak of other things. The morning prayer has become a period of meditation, on what, we are not sure; the benediction must now be called "closing words" lest we offend some "very liberal" person; hymns must be fine-tooth combed to cull them of illiberalisms and theological references offensive to the very liberal palate. How long is it, incidentally, since any of us has deemed it wise to preach from a text? It is not that we intend to do so, necessarily, but there is a question of the freedom of the pulpit and a particular kind of civil rights. I know of one church where the Christmas pageant had been replaced by a mock Hanukah ceremony, in spite of the fact the youngsters were Gentiles and Hanukah is a purely nationalist holiday. And the Lord's Prayer—dare I use it? If not, wherein lies my freedom?

Now, we are not suggesting there is no place in liberal religion for a strong emphasis on civil rights, extra-Christian religious thinking, so-

cial justice, and the rest. What does trouble this writer is the change which has taken place, the limitation of freedom of speech, pulpit and belief, which lead to a new tyranny. It would seem that new restrictions are being placed upon us, new stereotypes imposed, and that the traditional freedom of the free church is languishing. There are divisions among us when there should be unities and, instead of emphasizing the divisions, is it not time to say with Paul that we should cherish the best gifts, and follow after the more excellent way.

Comments on the Resolution

Because I believe that the personality of Jesus and his teachings have no moral and spiritual superior in any world-religion or secularist organization I am grieved at the trend away from emphasis on Jesus and the structure of Christianity.

Ideals are best served through personalities who fit the culture and the pattern of the particular civilization to which one belongs. For centuries the body of Jesus' teaching and his personal exemplification have guided the destiny of Western civilization. I cannot conceive of Buddha, Mohammed, or any other world religious leader being as good an influence on our children as the name and teachings of Jesus. I say to all Unitarians, the art of living profitably as a church or individual is not to discard hard-won values for some transient new philosophy or practice.

It seems the height of irony that most of the meetings of the Conference at which the word "Christian" was dropped from the title of the Association's monthly magazine should have been held in the church of one of the greatest and most Christian of our preachers, William Ellery Channing. Unitarianism in the past has been a vital force in shaping the religious life of our country. It is a real tragedy to see it, in our time, degraded to little more than a social philosophy.

The May Meeting Resolutions were a disgrace. They always worry me. We, who live in and around Boston, always have to hang our heads after the voting day, and I do not like it. On issues such as this last one, I cannot see why two hundred and sixty-six people should be privileged to speak for a hundred thousand of us.

PROMPT ACTION

The Church of All Souls in New York City wasted no time in stating their reaction to the passage of the anti-Christian resolution. Below is a full transcript of their vote. It will appear in the *Christian Unitarian Register*. It is printed here with their permission.

WE DEPLORE

the action of the May Meeting in adopting by a vote of 266 to 205 the following resolution:

WHEREAS: It is our desire as Unitarians to encourage all religious liberals, regardless of cultural background or religious tradition, whether Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Confucianist, Hindu, Moslem or other, to unite with us; and

WHEREAS: The identification of the Unitarian monthly magazine as the *Christian Register* creates a misleading impression that our churches and Fellowships are exclusively for individuals who fully accept the primacy of the Christian religious tradition; and

WHEREAS: The monthly Unitarian magazine should be more closely identified in its title with the Unitarian denomination so that it can function more adequately as an instrument for interesting persons of liberal religious thought in the Unitarian movement;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the name *Christian Register* should be changed to *Unitarian Register;* and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the *Unitarian Register* should carry on its masthead a suitable statement of its founding in 1821 as the *Christian Register.*

We regret the occurrence of the kind of thinking reflected in this resolution. All Souls considers itself to be a Unitarian Church with a belief in the primacy of the Christian tradition, at the same time respecting other religious beliefs. We believe that a positive program of respect for all individual beliefs (including the Christian) is essential to the continued vitality of our denomination and must be advanced and supported by all Churches within our denomination that consider themselves to be in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. All Souls believes that one of the principal functions of the Unitarian denomination is to lead the way for the return of Christian Churches to the simple religion taught by Jesus.

We hope Churches and individuals will join with us in bringing this issue before the Biennial Conference in October, and invite their expressions on how this should best be done.

Board of Trustees, All Souls Unitarian Church, 80th St. & Lexington Ave., New York 21, N. Y.

Introducing Our Contributors . . .

James Luther Adams was ordained to the Unitarian ministry in 1927 and has served churches in Salem and Wellesley Hills, both in Massachusetts. He holds degrees from the University of Minnesota, Harvard University and the Universty of Chicago, where he received his Ph. D. in 1946. He has taught at the Meadville Theological School as a member of the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago. Last year he was made Professor of Christian Ethics at Harvard University where he now teachers.

Edwin C. Broome, Jr., was ordained to the Unitarian ministry in 1936 and has served churches in Belmont, Mass., and Phoenix, Arizona. He holds degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University, and Brown University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1940. He has taught at Harvard and the Crane Theological School and was Dean of Chapel at Colorado College from 1949-1951. He is at the present time Personnel Secretary of the Near East Foundation in New York City.

George Huntston Williams was ordained to the Unitarian ministry in 1940. He holds degrees from St. Lawrence University, the Meadville Theological School and Union Theological Seminary, where he received the Ph.D. degree in 1946. He taught at the Starr King School for the Ministry before joining the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School ten years ago. In 1955 he was made Professor of Church History.

EDITORIAL

(Continued from page 2)

Those of us who feel bitterly aggrieved by the passing of the Resolution will have to admit that we have not a single square inch of technical ground for our grievance. All we can do is to give some expression to our regret, and derive therefrom what comfort we may.

For example: we can say that the Resolutions Committee might have used their discretion to a fairer and a wiser end had they recommended the postponement of this resolution to a date far enough in the future to permit of a more widespread recognition of its importance, more preliminary discussion among the lay-members of our churches, and in general a better preparation for deliberate and intelligent voting. There is no denying the fact that approximately half of our Fellowship feel a certain indignation over this matter. Long experience with these "resolutions" has bred in us a feeling toward them of mingled amusement and disgust. They are habitually offered with an air of ethical pomposity, as much as to say: "It rests with us Unitarians to pass the final verdict as to the rightness or wrongness of anything that anybody is doing anywhere in the world; the world is waiting for that verdict; not until that verdict is passed favorably will the world feel that it is safe to go ahead and do that thing."

So, at our annual meetings in May, when it comes time for the "Resolutions," most of us begin to wince, and say to ourselves: This is the time we customarily make awful fools of ourselves. Look at those reporters up there right under the edge of the platform; how eager and alert they are! Why can we not, for good and all, abolish this item from our agenda? People in such a mood can hardly vote intelligently. Some leave the hall; many refrain from voting; all heave a sigh of relief when the last resolution has been disposed of, and this little annual display of self-righteousness comes to an end.

Our indignation is caused by the introduction of this matter among the resolutions. It is more than a resolution; it is a matter of serious policy. It should have full attention, full deliberation, and virtually unanimous backing. It touches us all deeply, for it tends to put an entirely new complexion, and one that about half of us bitterly resent, upon our common Unitarianism. To tuck it in among the Resolutions is to introduce it at the most psychologically inopportune moment in the whole week. We are not in the habit of taking the Resolutions very seriously. We cannot be blamed if we suspect that someone has deliberately "slipped over a fast one on us."

Any fair-minded man will agree with us that the Resolutions Committee made a mistake in permitting this resolution to be presented for action; and that now the only magnanimous, in fact the only honorable, thing to do is to rescind the vote of approval, and then go about this matter of dropping the word "Christian" in a more regular way—by petitioning the President and Board of Directors to engineer some plebiscite, or mail out a questionnaire to all lay-adherents as well as ministers of all our churches, and thus arrive at a fairly correct idea of the wishes and opinions of the entire Fellowship.

Incidentally, the very best thing that could happen to the *Register* and also to the entire denomination would be to have a group of well-to-do Unitarians gather a substantial fund of money, enough to buy back the *Register* and also leave a sustentation fund the income of which would make up the inevitable annual deficits in the running of the paper. To give the *Register* its original independence, its self-direction, its ability to comment, criticise, suggest, publish every sort of opinion so it be honest—it seems too good to be true. Perhaps it is too good not to be true.

C. E. P.

MEMBERSHIP BLANK

May 1, 195 , to May 1, 195

I am interested in the aims and work of the Fellowship and enclose the following in payment for the current year. I understand this includes my subscription to THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN, published quarterly.

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